

**ASSESSING AN UPDATED EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL SYSTEM FOR CHIEF
OFFICERS IN THE LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

BY: Roxanne V. Bercik
Los Angeles Fire Department
Los Angeles, California

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ABSTRACT

Effective personnel management/development requires that employees be evaluated on an annual basis along with being provided with feedback and input that aligns with the mission/goals of the organization. This not only assists with the overall development of the employee but assists in moving the organization forward as a whole. As part of the management team it is imperative that Chief Officers receive these annual appraisals along with input and feedback so they truly understand their role in the fire service. The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) currently uses an outdated Executive Appraisal process for Chief Officers. The purpose of this research project was to identify current performance appraisal systems that will enable the LAFD to update the appraisal system now being used for Chief Officers. Evaluative research was used to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current performance appraisal system being used for Chief Officers in the LAFD?
2. What are the issues or concerns with the current performance appraisal system for Chief Officers being used by the LAFD?
3. What performance appraisal systems are being used by other public safety agencies of similar size along with private sector organizations to evaluate their Chief Officers or Executive Officers?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of implementing these performance appraisal systems within the LAFD?

The procedures employed included a literature review, review of selected fire departments programs, and a questionnaire to LAFD Chief Officers. The findings of this research discovered that various appraisal systems existed and were being used by other fire departments to provide clear feedback, input and development for Chief Officers.

Based on this research, it is recommended that the LAFD develop a new Executive Appraisal process for Chief Officers. A joint-labor management project team needs to be established to evaluate various appraisal systems, and develop a new system for use within the LAFD. Additionally, this project team should include civilian staff specializing in personnel management to assist as subject matter experts.

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INTRODUCTION

It is imperative that all employees have feedback on their overall performance and this is even more essential at the management level so that the vision/mission of the organization is accomplished. Chief Officers can be considered the management level within the fire service and are the critical element in moving their respective departments forward. Chief Officers need to truly understand the overall philosophy of the department and effectively communicate this information to their subordinates. Additionally, Chief Officers need to know how effective they are in their positions along with being evaluated on their overall performance and contribution to the department/fire service.

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) has an Executive Performance Appraisal process in place for Chief Officers but it is outdated and has not been updated for over twenty years. The purpose of this research project is to identify current performance appraisal systems that will enable the LAFD to update the appraisal system now being used for Chief Officers. Evaluative research methodologies were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the current performance appraisal system being used for Chief Officers in the LAFD?
2. What are the issues or concerns with the current performance appraisal system for Chief Officers being used by the LAFD?
3. What performance appraisal systems are being used by other public safety agencies of similar size along with private sector organizations to evaluate their Chief Officers or Executive Officers?

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of implementing these performance appraisal systems within the LAFD?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The LAFD is an all-risk life/safety provider for approximately 3.8 million residents living within a geographical area of 464 square miles (Wells, 2005). The City of Los Angeles is comprised of residential, commercial, high-rise, urban-wildland interface, Los Angeles International Airport, and the Port of Los Angeles. The LAFD has 103 fire stations with total of 3562 personnel and 333 civilian staff (Wells.2004). The LAFD responds to approximately 350,000 incidents annually. These incidents consist of 81 percent emergency medical responses and the other 19 percent are classified as fire related incidents (Wells, 2005). The fire related incidents consist of structure fires, reported smoke, automatic alarms, bells ringing, smoke detectors, water flow, auto fires and rubbish fires.

Of the total personnel listed above, the Chief Officer ranks consist of the following; 70 Battalion Chiefs, 16 Assistant Chiefs, five Deputy Chiefs, and one Fire Chief. Battalion and Assistant Chiefs can either work as field commanders or in an administrative staff position. There are 48 Battalion Chiefs and nine Assistant Chiefs assigned as field commanders. These field Battalion Commanders supervise approximately eight Captains assigned to five fire stations with an additional personnel total of 60 (Firefighters, Engineers, and Apparatus Operators. The field Assistant Chiefs supervises approximately five Battalion Commanders with a total personnel level of approximately 380 (Captains, Apparatus Operators, Engineers, and Firefighters). Deputy Chiefs

supervise the various Bureaus including; Emergency Services, Risk Management/Training, Administrative Services, Support Services, and Fire Prevention.

The LAFD has a definite semi-military structure and this is strongly adhered to regarding all activities and procedures. This definitive “chain of command” is implemented for all emergency and non-emergency events. Supervisors at all levels are responsible for evaluating their assigned personnel annually based on the established criteria. A standardized trait based evaluation procedure is used for the ranks of Captain and below. Chief Officers use a narrative Executive Appraisal process that was developed over twenty years ago. This outdated system incorporates some behavioral based criteria along with trait-based criteria. Chief Officers rely on this system for not only an annual evaluation but for merit salary raises. The current process has been a point of contention between the Chief Officers and Administration for over a year. There have been allegations of favoritism, discrimination, unfairness, and subjectivity by some Chief Officers regarding the current appraisal process.

This study is important to the LAFD for two reasons. First, it will enable the LAFD to re-evaluate the current Executive Appraisal process to determine what criteria is important to Chief Officers to be included within their evaluation. Secondly, it will allow the LAFD to evaluate current “state of the art” appraisal processes that are being used by other public and private agencies.

This Applied Research Project (ARP) relates to the National Fire Academy’s *Executive Leadership* course specifically Unit 1, Introduction. It

states the course goal is that Executive Fire Officers develop the ability to conceptualize and employ the key processes and interpersonal skills used by effective executive-level managers. In any organization, personnel are the most valuable resource and even more so in the fire service (Aurnhammer, 1996). Chief Officers are the leaders within the fire service and need to have an accurate evaluation of their leadership skills so they can continue to develop as effective leaders for the future of the fire service.

This ARP also relates to the United States Fire Administration's Five-Year Operational objectives in that it states the fire service should, "respond in a timely manner to emergent issues." A definite "emergent issue" is to assist in developing our current/future leaders to provide an overall more effective leadership role for the fire service of the future. An updated appraisal system for Chief Officers within the LAFD will definitely assist in developing our current and future fire service leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to determine what has been published regarding the topic of performance appraisals and to summarize these findings as they relate to this topic. The research was initiated at the National Fire Academy's Resource Learning Library and continued at the LAFD Research Library. An additional literature review was conducted on the Internet using search engines to explore this topic including any innovations in this area. The literature review targeted academic research, trade journals, and government

publications. All of this literature was reviewed for its correlation to this Applied Research Project.

Performance appraisal or evaluation is the process of identifying, measuring and developing human performance in organizations (Edwards, 2005). The actual term performance denotes a type of judgment regarding behavior that is being evaluated. An effective appraisal system should measure current performance levels and provide mechanisms for reinforcing strengths; identifying deficiencies and giving this information back to the employees so they can improve future performance (Beatty, 1982).

Performance appraisals are not new innovations and have been around for a long period of time including complaints about fairness/accuracy. The Chinese philosopher Sin Yu remarked about 1700 years ago, "The Imperial Rater of Nine Grades seldom rates men according to their merits, but always according to his likes and dislikes" (Solie, 2002). During the industrial revolution managers continued to attempt to rate the work of their employees. The initial motivation for these appraisals was to help managers provide tangible rewards and discipline when needed based on the contributions employees made towards the organization (Devries, 1981). Around the 1960's performance appraisals seemed to shift from a control mechanism to assist with overall employee development. In 1957, McGregor proposed that performance appraisals be used for counseling and developing employees (Devries, 1981).

Since this time period, performance appraisals have evolved into approximately five various formats used to rate employees. A brief description along with some strengths and weaknesses will be provided.

Global Ratings - This is a uni-dimensional rating format where the rater's overall estimate of performance occurs without distinguishing between critical job elements or dimensions (Baird, 1982). This format may be subject to legal issues because it is not based on a job-analysis and can be considered not truly job-related.

Trait-based scales – This is a familiar format sometimes referred to as graphic rating, based on traits dimensions such as loyalty, attitude, dependability, etc. (Edwards, 2005). Again, these are not sufficiently job-related dimensions and are not based on a thorough job-analysis. Thus, an organization may be vulnerable to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) litigation (Baird, 1982).

Behavior-based scales – This format is based on a thorough job-analysis and attempts to determine what an employee actually accomplishes at work (Hosea, 2004). Behavior based scales are often seen as more accurate because of their job-relatedness and specificity (Edwards, 2005).

Effectiveness-based systems – This multi-dimensional system attempts to provide “objective” indicators for levels of performance and is typically called Management by Objectives. This format provides a measure of an employee's contribution not their activities or behaviors (Edwards, 2005). This format is more versed to measure productivity and is easier to justify at lower levels within an organization (Baird, 1982). Additionally, this format places too much emphasis

on measurable quantitative objectives and in service organizations it may be difficult to quantify the objectives (Edwards, 2005).

360- Degree appraisal – This is a fairly new format that provides a multi-source feedback regarding the employee from supervisors, peers, and customers (Lepsinger, 1997). There seems to be some controversy on whether this system should be used as the appraisal method or as a developmental tool due to the possibility of subjectivity from the actual raters.

According to Graham (2005), performance appraisals are critical to a well-run organization. The completion of performance reviews with employees on a regular and predetermined basis is imperative for the sake of well being regarding any organization (Viola, 1999). This process will allow employees to become accustomed to being fairly judged for past performance. Although this applies to all employees, it is particularly important for executive, administrative, and professional personnel to be evaluated in this formal, annual basis (Voila, 1999). However, an ineffective, inaccurate performance appraisal system is worse than no appraisal system at all (Graham. 2005).

The present and future success of any organization definitely rests with its employees. A good evaluation process is possibly the most effective tool an organization can have to help ensure success (Hosea, 2004).

The most important resource is the people, because an organization would have a hard time providing services with just cash and a lot of equipment (Aurnhammer, 1996). In the fire service, the human factor is a critical element in our ability to provide services to our customers. The management of these

human resources is one of the most important functions in any fire department (Aurnhammer, 1996). Subordinates need to know how they are doing, managers need to know how their subordinates are performing and organizations need to know if personnel are being used effectively (Cuny, 2001).

Fire service organizations use performance appraisals for two basic purposes (Edwards, 2005). One is to measure performance in order to justify salary and other administrative decisions regarding employees. In fact, promotions, terminations, merit pay increases and other decisions may hinge on these evaluations (Edwards, 2005). The other purpose focuses on the actual development of the employee towards maximizing performance for the benefit of the organization (Edwards, 2005). Additionally, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard #1201 states, "Personnel performance evaluations should be among the documents included in member's comprehensive personnel record". This standard indicates a strong basis for fire departments to provide employees with a definitive performance appraisal.

Performance appraisals are a definite necessity for all organizations in order to motivate and develop their employees for future roles within the organization. The challenge is to move from a traditional, dysfunctional approach to one that incorporates updated management concepts. Completely eliminating performance appraisals is not the answer. Individuals need to be guided and encouraged to develop particular skills and to direct their performance toward critical organizational outcomes (Lawler, 2000). Approaches need to be developed that fit the new logic of management and reward excellence.

PROCEDURES

The research method used for this Applied Research Project was evaluative. The actual procedures included a literature review, questionnaire/feedback form, and a review of selected fire department's current performance appraisal systems. All of the above items were reviewed for their correlation to this Applied Research Project.

Definition of Terms

Assistant Chiefs (AC) – Second level of management within the LAFD, responsible for approximately one-third of the City of Los Angeles regarding all administrative, personnel, and emergency activities. May also work in an administrative capacity only at LAFD Headquarters or satellite location.

Battalion Chiefs (BC) – First level of management within the LAFD, responsible for approximately five or six fire stations including all administrative, personnel, and emergency activities. May also work in an administrative capacity only at LAFD Headquarters or a satellite location.

Chief Officer's Association – Employee bargaining unit for all Chief Officers besides the Fire Chief.

Fire Chief – General Manager of the Los Angeles Fire Department. This position is civil service exempt and appointed by the Mayor.

Special Duty – LAFD term used when employees work in an administrative capacity at a 40-hour week assignment.

Questionnaire/Feedback form

A questionnaire/feedback form was developed and distributed to all Assistant and Battalion Chiefs within the LAFD. This anonymous three-page questionnaire with an attached cover sheet was distributed to seventy Battalion Chiefs and sixteen Assistant Chiefs. This distribution was selected to include all first and second level management officers within the LAFD. The questionnaire was designed to solicit background information along with input regarding the applicable research questions. This anonymous mail-in questionnaire was selected over a telephonic approach to obtain candid answers from respondents along with facilitating a better questionnaire return ratio.

The questionnaires were distributed through the LAFD e-mail system. Respondents had the ability to reply through the Departments e-mail system or regular mail system. Individuals polled had approximately three-weeks to return the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire and cover letter has been included as Appendix A. Fifty-five of the eighty-six questionnaires were completed and returned. Data from the questionnaire was tabulated and is included as Appendix B.

Review of selected fire department's performance appraisal systems

Specific fire departments and a private sector organization were selected to review their current performance appraisals systems for Chief Officers or Executive Officers. The following fire departments were contacted personally, telephonically, and via e-mail to participate in this project: New York Fire Department (FDNY), San Francisco Fire Department, Los Angeles County Fire

Department, Phoenix Fire Department, Chicago Fire Department, London Fire Brigade, and New South Wales Fire Brigade. Additionally, United Parcel Service (UPS) was contacted regarding their Performance Appraisal system for Executive Officers. Chicago Fire Department declined due to the lack of an existing performance appraisal process for Chief Officers. London Fire Brigade was in the process of revamping their existing performance appraisal process and declined being included in this study. UPS indicated that their performance appraisal process was highly tied to quantitative areas regarding deliveries and may not be applicable for this study. Upon review of the UPS appraisal process this author agreed and decided to not include UPS in this study. FDNY appraisal system was reviewed and it was noted that their process was a typical trait based format. Therefore, this author chose to not include FDNY in this review. All other departments indicated their acceptance, conducted interviews either telephonically or in person, and forwarded various documents regarding their performance appraisal systems for Chief Officers.

Overall, four fire departments were utilized for this procedure due to the extensive documentation that needed to be reviewed, and the time constraints involved with this Applied Research Project. The following contacts were established at the selected fire departments and provided documents for review:

- Los Angeles County Fire Department – Deputy Chief Mike Morgan
- New South Wales Fire Brigade – Deputy Chief Mark Brown
- Phoenix Fire Department – Deputy Chief Todd Harms
- San Francisco Fire Department – Assistant Chief Lori Kalos

Assumptions and Limitations

The selection process for the fire departments to be reviewed contained some assumptions and limitations. The initial selection criteria included similarities to the LAFD in demographics, number of personnel, population, and similar rank structure. Additionally, international Departments were included to provide a broader scope of comparison. It was assumed that these similarities would provide a good comparison applicable to the LAFD. This provides an initial limitation of not including departments that are smaller even though they may have more innovative personnel management systems in place. Another limitation was the exclusion of some progressive fire departments based on their request or lack of information being submitted by this authors selected deadline. Lastly, the actual selection of only four fire departments provided a limitation to the actual research that could be evaluated that was pertinent to this topic. The author actually had a very difficult time locating fire departments of similar characteristics to the LAFD that were employing innovative performance appraisal systems and this will be demonstrated in the Results of this Applied Research Project.

RESULTS

Research Question #1 - What is the current performance appraisal system being used for Chief Officers in the LAFD?

The current performance appraisal system being used to evaluate Chief Officers was implemented in 1988. (It should be noted that this 1988 version is almost the exact same version dated 1983. The only modifications to the 1988

version were to make it generic in regards to gender and add the category of education.) The Executive Performance Appraisal is used to provide the written documentation for all formal performance evaluations of Chief Officers (LAFD, 1983). The appraisal is used annually, during Chief Officer's probation, and as a basis for merit pay.

The actual performance appraisal is a trait-based system applied in a narrative format. The evaluation is based on the Officers performance and the results of that performance during the rating period (LAFD, 1983). It should be noted that the rating period is based on the previous year and not the upcoming year. The performance appraisal has three main categories with sub-categories attached;

- Administration – planning, control, communications, decision-making, leadership, fire prevention, department programs, and affirmative action.
- Operations – directing, coordination, job knowledge, and development.
- Personal Qualifications – departmental relations, innovation, loyalty, reliability/dependability, initiative, courage, bearing, consistency, and education.

Each of these areas has approximately a one or two sentence narrative describing them in the performance appraisal instructions. The instructions also indicate that these areas should be addressed by the rater in a narrative format

along with providing applicable examples of demonstrated performance if available (LAFD, 1988).

The overall ratings that can be achieved by Chief Officers are unsatisfactory, satisfactory, excellent, and outstanding. The actual process for executive appraisals within the LAFD is that they are completed by the supervisor and submitted for review to the next level supervisor but all are addressed to the Fire Chief with final recommendations. Also, it should be noted here that the majority of Chief Officers write their own appraisal and merely submit them to their supervisor for review. This is a definite accepted procedure and preferred by most supervisors within the LAFD to assist them with the appraisal process. Some supervisors may request only a listing of applicable examples to the above areas and the actual supervisor will draft the final version but this is not the typical request.

The current appraisal process does not require any mutual goal setting between the rater and ratee. Additionally, there are no required meetings prior to the actual review of the final document between the rater and ratee. This type of system provides for minimal exchange of information and input between these parties prior to the final review of the appraisal.

There is no system in place if a Chief Officer disagrees with their performance appraisal rating. Based on this issue, there has recently been a mutual agreement between the Chief Officer's Association and the Fire Chief regarding performance appraisals. Both parties have agreed that contested evaluations will be held at the Fire Chief's level and reviewed after a new

performance appraisal process has been established. This allows Chief Officers to not be adversely impacted by the current outdated system.

Research Question #2 – What are the issues or concerns with the current performance appraisal system for Chief Officers being used by the LAFD?

The results from the Executive Appraisal Questionnaire provided some definite insight into this area. First of all, it should be noted that 96% of the respondents indicated that they had received an Executive Performance Appraisal and of that 64% indicated that the current system did not fairly evaluate their performance. This is a fairly significant response and indicative of Chief Officers being dissatisfied with the outdated system being used by the LAFD. Additionally, of the respondents that believed they were not evaluated fairly, 34% indicated that it was due to the unwritten standards, 26% indicated that it was due to the subjectivity of the system, and 23% indicated that it was because the performance standards were unclear. Again, this demonstrates that there are some serious concerns by Chief Officers regarding the current appraisal process. The following are comments regarding this area;

“It’s not really an appraisal system since we write our own evaluation. It is more of a justification so we can get our merit pay. The standards need to be defined and the connection to pay needs to be removed. It all depends on who you work for and how they understand and enforce the unwritten standards...way too subjective.”

“Performance standards are inconsistent. Some members are told you cannot be rated excellent or outstanding unless you have completed

special duty. Other members are rated excellent or outstanding without ever being on special duty.”

These anonymous comments from Chief Officers provide a general idea that Chief Officers are well aware that the current appraisal system could be a much better process.

Additionally, respondents indicated that the current system did not allow for future growth and 85% responded that the current system did not assist in becoming a more effective manager. Some comments in this area are illustrated below;

“The format is a rear-view mirror picture not very forward looking.

Chief Officers need to be challenged to meet future goals.”

“Evaluates past performance and does not provide for future performance measures.”

“Does not provide direction for improvement and does not truly document problems.”

These comments give an overview that Chief Officers know the current appraisal system is lacking in providing a “roadmap” for future growth as a leader in the LAFD.

Respondents provided definite insight into what modifications they would recommend to the current appraisal system in that 37% indicated there should be better quantifiable rating measures, 27% indicated there should be more specific rating measures, and 18% indicated there should be less subjective measures.

The following are some comments from respondents regarding this area:

“More consensus between Chief Officers and his/her supervisor as to what is expected of them to accomplish during the rating period. This should be done at the beginning of the year with a mid-year meeting to see how things are going.”

“The rating system could use improvement but the main reason is lack of consistency. Every rater measures against a different ideal standard.”

“The system is pathetic, in dire need of reform. No system is perfect but the current one is no measure of performance.”

These comments verify that Chief Officers understand the importance of input and consistency within the appraisal process and would like to see these modifications done within the current system. Overall, Chief Officers voiced their concerns about the current system and definitely indicated that it needed to be updated.

Research Question #3 – What performance appraisal systems are being used by other public safety agencies of similar size along with private sector organizations to evaluate Chief Officers or Executive Officers?

Los Angeles County Fire Department

The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACOFD) is currently using an annual Management Appraisal and Performance Plan to evaluate Chief Officers. The Evaluator and the employee meet prior and mutually determine goals for the rating period. It is mandatory that these goals will further the County's and Departments strategic plans. Each goal needs to have a product or service to be

delivered or enhanced and some can be considered stretch goals if they are multi-year.

Additionally, there are two behavior-rating areas that are numerical rated including examples if applicable. The first area is, *Providing Quality Services* and includes the following components: customer service, workforce development, fiscal responsibility, and improving internal operations. The second area is, *Living by County Vision and Values*, and includes the following components: team-building/collaboration, leadership/organizational awareness, compliance with county policies and board directives, innovation/creativity, and ethics.

Based on the above sections the overall final performance that can be achieved are the following; unsatisfactory, needs improvement, merit performance, and exceptional performance. Additionally, a mid-year adjustment/amendment is provided if goals are put into place after the original plan was developed. Both the evaluator and the employee mutually agree upon these mid-year adjustments. It also should be noted that the entire Management appraisal and Performance plan being used by LACOFD was revised in 2003.

New South Wales Fire Brigade

New South Wales (NSW) Fire Brigades is currently using a Professional Development Plan (PDP) to annually evaluate Chief Officers. The objective of the PDP is to assist the NSW Fire Brigades to achieve its overall objectives by enhancing employee's work performance. The following is the policy statement regarding the PDP:

“Professional and performance development is a valuable process that has clear benefits for officers and the Brigades. It is based on recognition of the value of people within the Brigades and the key role people play in delivering a responsive and professional service to the community (NSW Fire Brigade PDP, 2005).

The PDP has been developed to establish clear links between the Brigades corporate priorities and the contributions of officers and teams. The PDP provides a mechanism for: clarifying roles/responsibilities, establish agreed approaches for setting performance goals, establishing improved communications pathways, and building a structured approach to skills enhancement.

The PDP consists of two parts; the Individual Work Plan and the Individual Development Plan. The emphasis in this approach is on acknowledging achievements while working cooperatively to improve skills, to the mutual benefit of the officer and the Brigades. The PDP is a confidential document and will only be shared internally and not released to another government agency.

The Individual Work Plan is a negotiated agreement between the employee and the manager. This two-way process is mutually beneficial by linking individual goal achievement to the Fire Brigades’ goals. The Individual Work Plan has the following criteria; clarifies individual work objectives and links them to corporate business plans, identifies an employees successes along with constructively reviewing endeavors not successful, and addresses the Fire

Brigades “Critical Capabilities for Success” goals to achieve a measurable outcome.

The Individual Development Plan represents an opportunity for managers to assess their own development needs against the “Ten Management Competencies” that have been developed for senior Fire Brigades Management. Again, this is a collaborative effort between the evaluator and the employee. The Competencies are:

- Manage the implementation of community safety strategies
- Develop and administer agency policy, procedures/practices
- Contribute to policy formulation and revision
- Establish and maintain the occupational health/safety system
- Manage and facilitate change
- Manage projects
- Determine threat assessments
- Promote the organizations mission and services
- Manage organizational communication strategies
- Manage Financial resources

All of the above competencies are important and represent the collective skills needed to be able to operate effectively as a senior manager in the NSW Fire Brigades. These skills are rated on a numerical and narrative manner with applicable demonstrated performance.

Additionally, it should be noted that the NSW Fire Brigades use an Individual Learning Plan that looks to the future and explores various career

options to all employees. This is an adjunct to the Individual Development Plan and the Individual Work Plan to assist in future performance and career goals.

Phoenix Fire Department

Phoenix Fire Department (PFD) is currently using a Performance Achievement program that is designed to; give a framework for planning the years work for the manager/unit, use a measurable point system to report a manager's work, provide opportunities for feedback on performance, and assist in awarding pay-for –performance merit increases. PFD indicates that the benefits to the employee are; participation, planning, feedback, and development. Additionally, PFD indicates that the benefits to the City are; direction, better teamwork, and confidence.

The Performance Achievement program follows a four-step process and is based on a 1400-point system. It should be noted here that the manager and supervisor set most priorities/points; however, the City Manager assigns Citywide responsibilities with priorities for all plans. The program follows the fiscal year and all forms are available on the City network system. The following is a basic outline of the steps;

Step One - Plan development (June to July and ongoing)

Each manager develops a plan to submit to his/her supervisor. The approved plan is kept on file and submitted to the City Manager's office.

Step Two – Implementation (continuous with a January review)

Managers implement and follow through on their plans. Each January a mid-year review is conducted to assess the progress and required adjustments.

Step Three – Evaluation (Ongoing with July/August finalization)

Managers are required to collect data/documentation to verify implementation of their plan. In June/July manager completes the official 1000-point evaluation worksheet and submits to supervisor. The supervisor completes a 200-point evaluation and the City manager completes a 200-point evaluation.

Step 4 – Salary Setting (September/October)

City Manager's Office collects the results and determines salary increases based on performance scores.

This provides a basic overview of the PFD performance achievement process and definitely highlights the interaction between manager, supervisor, and City Manager. This innovative system provides a definite interactive process with all the stakeholders along with re-establishing some priorities on an annual basis.

San Francisco Fire Department

San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) uses a narrative trait based performance appraisal process. Chief Officers are rated on their duties and responsibilities such as; work environment, emergency operations, prevention/investigation activities, station management, administrative duties, training, and personnel management. Each of these areas are rated at the first meeting in a numerical manner with mandatory comments attached as

supporting evidence. A second progress meeting is conducted prior to the annual evaluation date and updates are added to the original report. Included in the updates are specific comments about the employees overall performance including strengths and weaknesses along with a plan for improvement in those areas.

The required meetings allow the rater and rate to discuss the performance appraisal and areas that need to be improved upon along with developing some type of roadmap for the future. This system definitely allows input by both individuals to assist in developing a better employee.

Research Question #4 –What are the advantages and disadvantages of implementing these performance appraisal systems within the LAFD?

There are numerous advantages of implementing a new appraisal system within the LAFD. Some of the benefits include; that it will be a more collaborative/objective process including written standards and consistent/clear performance objectives, increased morale, will provide a “roadmap” for future performance and overall accountability to Department/City’s goals. These benefits have been realized by other agencies that are using a more collaborative performance appraisal process specifically Phoenix Fire Department and New South Wales Fire Brigades. Overall, management employees have a much clearer understanding of their role within the organization along with their responsibility for moving the organization forward.

There are some disadvantages to implementing a new appraisal system within the LAFD also. Obviously, it will require staff work to research various

formats and provide some type of template to be implemented within the LAFD. This will require assigning personnel to this task and it will be a financial cost to the Department. Additionally, the implementation of a new appraisal process will require an agreement with the Chief Officers Association so it will require a labor/management agreement process. This will require negotiations between both parties and can be a timely process. Additionally, there will need to be a “buy-in” from Chief Officers regarding the new evaluation process.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a need for a new Executive Appraisal System for Chief Officers. The current LAFD appraisal system is outdated and does not provide direction for future performance. A respondent to the questionnaire indicated that, “(It) focuses on past performance not the future”. The success of an organization rests with the employees (Hosea, 2004). It is imperative that employees know how they are performing as well as how they can assist in moving the organization forward. The attainment of organizational goals coupled with maximum employee growth are the signs of true organizational success (Hosea, 2004). Performance appraisals that were reviewed by this author all included an area that focused on future goals and expectations to assist in the overall development of leaders within the organization. This should definitely be a consideration for inclusion into any new performance appraisal system being developed by the LAFD so that the organization can move forward as a whole.

Performance appraisals are probably the most recognized and relied upon method to improve performance (Aurnhammer, 1996). Employees want and need feedback concerning their overall performance and future contribution to the organization. For evaluations to be viable and beneficial, the process must be ongoing, include both the positive and negative aspects of the employees' performance, and be done in an atmosphere that encourages open dialogue (Aurnhammer, 1996). The appraisal should involve considerable dialogue and interaction between the supervisor and employee (Laford, 1998). The current LAFD Executive Appraisal System is merely a scorecard of past accomplishments with no true feedback or input from the employee. A respondent to the questionnaire indicated his dissatisfaction with the current system;

“There should be more consensuses between Chief Officers and their supervisors as to what is expected of them to accomplish during the rating period and for future performance. This should be accomplished at the beginning for the year along with a mid-year meeting to see how things are going.”

This type of interaction between rater and ratee is definitely missing in the current LAFD Executive Appraisal process. The ratee actually drafts his/her own performance appraisal and submits this document to the rater. There is no pre-meeting to discuss goals and expectations let alone future development. Lawler, (2000), refers to this as a “dysfunctional appraisal” when there is no meaningful discussion between the rater and rated member. This is definitely an area where

the LAFD appraisal process needs improvement and an open dialogue between Chief Officer and supervisor needs to be considered for any future system.

The current LAFD appraisal system is critically lacking in quantifiable rating dimensions as indicated by respondents from the questionnaire, 37% stated this was a modification they would make to the current system. Lawler (2000) indicates that appraisals fail because the performance measures consist of ratings that are vaguely or poorly defined traits such as reliability, communication skills, and leadership. Appraisal programs created without clear objectives as to “what is expected to be accomplished” become creative exercises in style (Fournies, 1983). Rating areas should be considered that are behavior and outcome–based measures that quantify or at least clearly identify the behaviors that are needed. It is important to focus on and measure observable behaviors and the business outcomes they produce (Lawler, 2000). This will establish a relationship between the strategy/mission of the organization and the actual appraisal (Fournies, 1983). This type of objective was demonstrated by nearly all of the appraisal processes reviewed by this author especially the Phoenix Fire Department, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and New South Wales Fire Brigade. These departments had specific areas within their appraisal process that reflected the employee’s contribution to the City, department, or overall strategic plan. The current LAFD appraisal system does not include this type of “global “concept and employees are not evaluated on measurable objectives that relate to the overall mission of the Department/City. This is fairly significant issue because Chief Officers within the

LAFD are the management of the organization, yet they are not evaluated on clear objectives that relate to the overall Departments or City's goals/mission. This should definitely be considered when a new appraisal process is being evaluated for Chief Officers.

Lastly, the question of who should actually designs the new appraisal process needs to be considered. It is very apparent that developing an effective process is not a simple task. A respondent to the questionnaire indicated, "Who will coach the coaches" to a question addressing this area. Often, the best answer to the question of who should design an appraisal system is the individuals who will be affected by the system (Lawler, 2000). This type of process definitely allows input into the actual system being considered and should assist with "buy-in" from the effected employees. Baird (1982) indicates that when employees have the opportunity to provide the basic inputs to the development of responsibilities and duties and have a final sign-off on the description and ordering of these items there is a much greater likelihood of achieving a high degree of agreement between supervisor and subordinate. This would indicate that having a team of employees within the organization gather the information, evaluate, and develop a new format would be a positive alternative and provide management the opportunity to have input also (LaFord, 1998). The re-designing of the current appraisal system in the LAFD should include input from the Chief Officers as was highlighted in the questionnaire. This should be a concept that is considered regarding the LAFD model for developing a new appraisal system.

RESULTS

Based on this study, it is recommended that the LAFD develop and implement a new Executive Appraisal System for Chief Officers. As a large metropolitan fire department, it is important that the LAFD continue to provide a leadership role within the fire service. More importantly, it is imperative that the LAFD truly acknowledge its management employees and assist them in becoming the effective fire service leaders of the future. The LAFD is at a transition period and this is an opportune time to make these changes for the benefit of the employees, department, and City of Los Angeles.

A joint-labor management project team needs to be established to evaluate various appraisal systems, and develop a new system for use within the LAFD. It is imperative that this project team consists of management representatives, Labor representatives (Chief Officers), and civilian specialists to facilitate this process. This will allow for a collaborative approach regarding the actual development and implementation of a new appraisal process by the actual employees that are affected by this program.

Additionally, this project team needs to evaluate the current appraisal programs that are already being used within the public and private sector. This will allow for a definite “best practice” to be determined by the project team. It may involve using select items from specific department’s appraisal systems but it will allow the project team to move forward with a “tried and true” approach to this issue and not have to “reinvent the wheel”. This is an important concept because elements or concepts can be applied from other agencies that are

applicable to the LAFD appraisal and this will provide more credibility to the overall system/process.

The implementation of a new Executive Appraisal System within the LAFD will assist in increasing morale, provide Chief Officers with credible feedback/input regarding performance, and help develop future fire service leaders. Employees are the backbone of any organization and they should be respected and appreciated for their current and future contributions to the organization and society as a whole. The employees within the LAFD deserve the best appraisal system available and the Citizens of Los Angeles deserve the best fire service leaders attainable.

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APPENDIX A

EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL QUESTIONNAIRE

I am conducting a questionnaire as part of my Applied Research Project for the National Fire Academy. I am distributing this questionnaire to all Assistant Chiefs and Battalion Chiefs.

This questionnaire is anonymous; please do not right your name on it. Please complete it to the best of your ability and return it to me via Department mail by September 15, 2005. Your responses are definitely important because they will be utilized within my overall research and the Departments evaluation of the appraisal system. If you have any questions please contact me at (213) 978-3857.

If you would like a copy of the completed paper, please contact me and I will forward one upon its final evaluation.

Again, I thank you for your participation in this project.

Sincerely,

Roxanne V. Bercik
Assistant Chief
CHE – 18th Floor

EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What rank do you currently hold with the LAFD?

Assistant Chief _____
 Battalion Chief _____

2. How long have you held this rank?

0-2 years _____
 3-5 years _____
 6-10 years _____
 11-14 years _____
 15 + years _____

3. Have you ever received an Executive Appraisal as a Chief Officer? (If no, please go directly to question #6).

Yes _____
 No _____

4. If yes, do you believe that the current appraisal system fairly evaluated your overall performance?

Yes _____
 No _____

5. If you responded "no" to the above question, please indicate why you believe that your overall performance was not evaluated fairly.

Subjectivity of current system _____
 Unwritten Standards _____
 Raters Biases _____
 Performance standards unclear _____
 Other _____ (please describe below)

6. Additionally, do you believe that the current appraisal system provides a “road-map” for you as a Chief Officer to become a more effective management level employee for the LAFD?

Yes _____
No _____

7. If “no” to the above question, please indicate why you believe the current system does not provide this “road-map”.

8. What modifications to the current appraisal system would you recommend?

Quantifiable rating dimensions _____
Specific rating dimensions _____
Numerical rated dimensions _____
Less subjective dimensions _____
More input from rated employee _____
Other _____ (please list below)

9. Are you aware of the “Executive Coaching” type appraisal system?

Yes _____
No _____

10. If “yes” to the above question, do you believe that this could be effectively used as a management appraisal system within our Department?

Yes _____
No _____

(Please describe why or why not) _____

11. Are there any other appraisal systems you are aware of that you believe could be used by our Department?

Why or Why Not? Please explain

THANKS FOR YOUR INPUT!!!

APPENDIX B

EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

| | QUESTION | Assistant Chief | Battalion Chief |
|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 | What rank do you currently hold with the LAFD | 10 (18%) | 45 (82%) |

| | QUESTION | 0-2 Years | 3-5 Years | 6-10 Years | 11-14 years | 15 + Years |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| 2 | How long have you held this rank? | 13 (24%) | 16 (29%) | 13 (24%) | 8 (15%) | 5 (8%) |

| | QUESTION | YES | NO |
|---|---|----------|--------|
| 3 | Have you ever received an Executive Appraisal as a Chief Officer? (If no, please go directly to question #6). | 53 (96%) | 2 (4%) |

| | QUESTION | YES | NO |
|---|---|----------|----------|
| 4 | If yes, do you believe that the current appraisal system fairly evaluated your overall performance? | 20 (36%) | 35 (64%) |

| | QUESTION | Subjectivity of current system | Unwritten Standards | Raters biases | Performance Stand, unclear | Other |
|---|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------------|--------|
| 5 | If you responded "no" to the above question, please indicate why you believe that your overall performance was not evaluated fairly. | 9 (26%) | 12 (34%) | 5 (14%) | 8 (23%) | 1 (3%) |

Other Comments to #5

- Worked my butt off first two years rated “satisfactory” regardless of how many projects I did. I was told new Chiefs are not rated excellent. I have been rated “excellent” last three years but it was demoralizing the first two years. If pay was not tied to the evaluation there may be more latitude to rate members fairly.
- It’s not really an appraisal system since we write our own evaluation; it is more of a self justification so we can get our 6th step merit pay. The standards need to be defined and the connection to pay needs to be removed. It all depends on whom you work for and how they understand and enforce the unwritten standards...way to subjective.
- The process was generally fair during probation; however, one of my evaluations was an exact copy of the one that I received from a former supervisor. This evaluation rated me in areas of performance occurring two years prior to the appraisal. Additionally, this report was one year overdue. There are no checks and balances to ensure timeliness of production.
- Executive appraisal criteria haven’t changed in over twenty years. No would question that everything else on this Department and the world for that matter has!
- Current format does not clearly reflect my current job or lend itself to making me think strategically about what I need to accomplish.
- Performance standards are inconsistent. Some members are told you cannot be rated as excellent or outstanding unless you have completed special duty; this is an easy way out for the rater. Other members are rated excellent or outstanding without ever being on special duty. It comes down to the relationship between the BC and the AC and how involved or committed the rater is willing to become or do.
- Past practice or tradition. Also, lack of training or experience of the rater.

| | QUESTION | YES | NO | | | |
|---|---|---------|----------|--|--|--|
| 6 | Was the Building Inventory information accurate and up-to date for use on-scene at the emergency incident(s)? | 8 (24%) | 26 (76%) | | | |

#7. If no to the above question, please indicate why you believe the current system does not provide this roadmap?

- Poor communication updates as to how a member is doing
- There are categories but not criteria within categories or benchmarks
- I wrote my own evaluation
- What roadmap – click culture camps
- Not objective – no written guidelines

- Unclear goals/objectives
- It's all about justifying your excellent rating for money; it is not an evaluation by your supervisor since they don't even write the document. When I asked one supervisor what I had to do to get an "excellent" the next time, he said, "Just keep doing the same thing, I want to watch you for an entire year." I had worked on special duty for him for nine months, it was just a BS excuse to not give me an excellent and hold back a 6th step which he did not want to give me for some unknown reason.
- No quantifiable and measurable expectations and standards
- Mostly boilerplate. No real career development
- The current system only addresses performance issues presented by the member being evaluated. Generally this "roadmap" is not a component of the process.
- First, I am the one who writes my own evaluation. I'm told to fill in the information in several categories. Second, and as we speak it's over two months late.
- There is no identified target or standard. I see poor officers get good ratings through intimidation and other good officers get standard ratings because every Chief is rated by their supervisor against their own standards.
- The format is a "rearview" mirror picture, not very forward looking. Chief Officers need to be challenged to meet future goals.
- There are no clear directions of what one needs to obtain each rank.
- Very little guidelines from AC, especially for new BC's. Executive appraisal expectations are given to new BC's before the report card but not when appointed too late.
- The system is not a reflection of one's performance. It is based upon impressions of each individual Chief Officer formulated by a select few who are judged to be the forefront of the organization by the administration – very subjective.
- Except as a probationary BC, it is very rare that I have ever been given information on how to improve my rating. It has been my experience that most raters are too busy to spend a lot of time with the evaluation process. They have normally taken the information that I have provided for them and reworked it into an executive appraisal document.
- Because we basically write our own evaluations and are provided with very little direction.
- Evaluates past performance and doesn't provide for future performance measures.
- Because we write our own evaluations and talk about how good we are without any true feedback from our supervisors. There are no goals or objectives discussed by the rater. Currently, the only time an evaluation is of any value is when money is involved.
- Focus is on past achievement not future goals.
- Current system states past accomplishments not desired objectives during rating period.
- Does not provide direction for improvement and does not truly document problems.

- There are categories but no criteria within these categories or benchmarks to shoot for.
- AC provides expectations.
- Should be reviewed and updated on regular basis with employee and employer to determine member's ongoing appraisal and relationship.

| | QUESTION | Quantifiable rating measures | Specific measures | Numerical dimensions | Less sub. dimen | More input ratee | Other |
|---|---|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------|
| 8 | What modifications to the current appraisal system would you recommend? | 20 (37%) | 15 (27%) | 5 (9%) | 10 (18%) | 3 (5%) | 2 (4%) |

Other comments to #8

- A different system would be better you type the Encyclopedia Britannica of projects, community relations, etc, and get rated excellent and another member submits three pages and he is rated outstanding because that's what he got last year.
- We write our own evaluation.
- The rating should include quantifiable dimensions but should also involve some subjectivity. Each dimension rated should have a relative weight. Not all dimensions have equal importance.
- More consensus between Chief Officers and his/her supervisor as to what is expected of them to accomplish during the rating period. This should be done at the beginning of the year with a mid-year meeting to see how things are going.
- Are the use of response times and IOD injury occurrences really rated for one battalion to another?
- Any system that is based upon the member's performance as opposed to how well he or she is favored by the inner circle of accepted employees.
- A consistent standard of bench marks on what a member has to accomplish to be satisfactory, excellent or outstanding. At the present time, I believe the lines are extremely gray and open to a wide range of interpretation.
- Establish goals and objectives each year for the members so that there are no surprises when the evaluation is presented. Don't use Sick time or number of accidents as benchmarks, can't contract these problems as Chief Officers.

| | QUESTION | YES | NO |
|---|--|----------|----------|
| 9 | Are you aware of the Executive development coaching type appraisal system? | 10 (18%) | 45 (82%) |

| | QUESTION | YES | NO |
|----|--|---------|---------|
| 10 | If yes to the above question, do you believe that this could be effectively used as a management appraisal system within our Department? | 9 (90%) | 1 (10%) |

| | QUESTION | YES | NO |
|----|--|-----|-----------|
| 11 | Are there any other appraisal systems you are aware of that you believe could be used by our Department? | 0 | 55 (100%) |

QUESTION #11 WHY OR WHY NOT

- Simplistic – what the civilian staff receives, accomplishments, addendums, pertinent
- Unknown – I would support a system wherein specific and quantifiable variables are rated.
- Eliminates egos, clicks, sponsored favorite folks
- Remove paygrade associated with evaluation
- Look towards corporate business who rate with different systems
- The rating system could use improvement but the main problem is lack of consistency. Every rater measures against a different ideal standard.
- None in particular but anything would be better than the current system where one writes his/her own evaluation and regardless of its merit, is still based on a subjective conclusion.
- The systems pathetic in dire need of reform. No system is perfect but the current one is clearly no measure of performance.

- I would give credence to any system that objectively measures the Chief Officer's performance. The present system is an insult to any semblance of fairness and organizational management responsibility.
- We are having problems with our Executive Appraisal System because many have been promoted into ranks who have not been in positions to better prepare them for leadership responsibilities. A/O, Engineer, Captain II, OCD, Shops, etc, - many do not have experience and lack credibility as an officer. We need fire ground officers with an understanding of ethics and services to the public. Many of our people are out of shape; they look unfit and present a poor image to the public and to other members of our Department. I believe a fair evaluation will find that many of our people should be rated below satisfactory. Instead of promoting for political reasons promote as if your life depended on it.